

wanted to create a network of knowledgeable correspondents in Africa, indigenes as well as Europeans, who would provide information useful to European colonial rulers intent on developing enlightened administrative policies. With more rigorous editing, this collection might have been made more accessible. Nevertheless, it represents a valuable scholarly contribution.

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SWISS MISSIONARIES AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT AFRICA

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Butterflies & Barbarians: Swiss Missionaries & Systems of Knowledge in South-East Africa. By PATRICK HARRIES. Oxford: James Currey, 2007. Pp. xviii + 286. £55 (ISBN 978-085255-984-0); £19.95, paperback (ISBN 978-085255-983-3).

KEY WORDS: Southern Africa, anthropology, knowledge, missions.

This wonderful, complex study of missionary thought in action is probably best described as an extended meditation on the intricacies of cultural encounter on the imperial frontier. Adopting an uncompromising constructivist perspective, Harries illuminates the extent to which the production of knowledge in and about early colonial Africa was the fruit of a drawn-out process of interchange between European and African cognitive systems. In this sense, and despite the author disavowing any aim to write a comprehensive history of 'subaltern experience' (p. 2), *Butterflies & Barbarians* is no less a celebration of African 'agency in tight corners' than was Harries's earlier study of Mozambican migrant labourers at the outset of southern Africa's mining revolution.

Not the least arresting feature of this breathtakingly erudite volume is the author's command of the nineteenth-century intellectual history of French-speaking western Switzerland, whence the missionaries of the Swiss Romande Mission to south-eastern Africa originated and to which the book's first two chapters are dedicated. While Chapter 1 traces the Mission's origins in the revivalist movement that swept across western Switzerland in the first part of the century, Chapter 2 is especially concerned with the influence of missionary images of Africa on the metropole's social life. Through a painstaking analysis of an impressive array of missionary publications, Harries is able to establish a convincing correlation between the popularity of the Mission's African propaganda and the divided Swiss people's quest for unity and identity. But early missionary portrayals of Africans were not monochromatic. To be sure, the depiction of the evil, dark forces confronted by the missionaries provided home supporters with a 'measure of their own level of evolution and civilization' (p. 40). Yet missionary imagery also embodied the germ of an anti-modernist critique. The Africans of missionary propaganda were thus both the 'contemporary ancestors' whose very existence confirmed Europe's position 'at the summit of an ineluctable line of progress' (p. 48) and the simple, naive souls whom missionaries felt duty-bound to protect against the vices and materialism of capitalist modernity.

The book's overarching theme – the discursive interaction between knowledge systems – begins to unravel in Chapter 3, which takes the reader to the Swiss Mission's field of operation in north-eastern Transvaal and southern Mozambique. By examining the missionaries' efforts to rein in an African-led

Christian revival in the Delagoa Bay area in the mid-1880s, the chapter presents Christianity in Africa as a site of negotiation between imported and autochthonous forms of spirituality. The operations of this process of intellectual hybridization are most easily discernible in the scientific, linguistic and anthropological travails of the Swiss missionaries and, especially, Henri-Alexandre Junod, the polymath whose towering figure dominates the book's last six chapters. Throughout his career, Junod willfully drew on African expertise and knowledge. Yet Harries does not turn this all-important culture broker into a relativist *ante litteram*; and neither does he shy away from expounding on the racialized, evolutionist intellectual environment out of which his prodigious scholarly output emerged. In his botanical and entomological work (the subject of Chapter 5), Junod praised and drew on African understandings of the natural world, but, because of their utilitarian and animistic connotations, he still viewed them as falling far short of the standards set by European scientific rationality and organizing logic. At times, Junod's faith in the superiority of European science slid into an open justification of imperialism.

Similarly convoluted intellectual dynamics underlay the Swiss missionaries' efforts to construct and diffuse written vehicular languages for their African charges (Chapters 6 and 7). Even though he recognized the richness of oral languages, Junod was convinced that only their reduction to writing could discipline 'the "Bantu mind"' and enable both Christian morality and analytical rationality to replace the 'flexibility, impermanence and instability associated with orality' (p. 186). But the missionaries found it impossible to control the consequences of the process of social engineering they had set in motion. Not only was literacy often used by Africans to subvert the very reforming purposes that the missionaries had invested it with, but the 'discovery' and standardization of the 'Thonga' and 'Ronga' languages also gave an emerging African elite the opportunity to call into being new social communities whose future political significance the missionary could hardly fathom. Junod's 'salvage anthropology', discussed in Chapters 8 and 9, also made a decisive contribution to the ethnic streamlining of the region. His emphasis on fieldwork notwithstanding, Junod's taxonomic anxiety and evolutionist ideas led him to disregard the socioeconomic changes taking place around him (a failing for which he would soon be called to task by professional, university-based social anthropologists) and to view Africans as 'naturally tribal peoples fixed at an inferior level of evolution' (p. 218).

Harries stops short of presenting his 'microstudy' (p. 2) as paradigmatic, but there is little doubt that his approach to the construction of knowledge about Africa will prove a source of inspiration to countless social and cultural historians of the continent. Harries, however, might have seen fit to tackle head-on the question of the typicality of the experience of the Swiss Romande Mission. This reviewer, in particular, felt that the absence of comparative perspectives detracted somewhat from Harries's otherwise excellent discussion of the relationships between missionary propaganda and Romande politics of identity. Surely, I found myself wondering, French-speaking Swiss cannot have been the only European people whose sense of self owed something to missionary exploits in faraway lands. What, for instance, of Norway and the other Scandinavian countries that, like Switzerland, spawned significant missionary movements despite lacking any imperial possessions? Also puzzling is the very limited space that *Butterflies & Barbarians* allocates to missionary medicine, where, conceivably, the tensions between European and African ideas may have been even more pronounced than they were in the field of anthropology or the natural sciences. It is not clear whether the book's almost complete silence on the subject implies that the Swiss attributed comparatively little value to medical knowledge and the forms of

engagement with African societies that it brought in its wake. Despite these minor reservations, this lavishly illustrated volume remains a towering achievement that lifts mission studies to a level of sophistication rarely achieved in the past.

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AFRICAN RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES IN AMERICA

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African Immigrant Religions in America. Edited by JACOB K. OLUPONA and REGINA GEMIGNANI. New York: New York University Press, 2007. Pp. vii + 352. \$23 (ISBN 978-8147-6212-7).

KEY WORDS: African diaspora, Christianity, religion.

After reading this book one knows a great deal more about African immigrant religions in the United States and Canada. The publication adds to an understanding of the varieties of belief and religious practice in American urban settings and, particularly with regard to the image of Christianity, successfully deconstructs familiar notions of 'big' or 'world Christianity' known from historically more well-researched institutions, groups and their histories. *African Immigrant Religions* shows that to engage with religious groups outside the so-called Christian mainstream means to understand Christianity, as other world religions, in the context of people moving on a global scale.

Jacob K. Olupona and Regina Gemignani, who launched the fairly recent 'African Immigrant Religious Communities Project' and who edited the findings of an ongoing research project, recommended that all the authors should address in their contributions issues of identity, of transnationalism and of global religious movement. In addition, it was suggested that contributors should conceptualize migration as a dynamic and agency-oriented process, and they were requested to provide, if possible, perspectives on civic participation and political expression from a gender-sensitive standpoint. Basing their chapters on ethnographic research in religious communities (often their own religious communities), authors took up these suggestions, and emphasized them, in different ways. To stress the connectedness of the various religious communities' perspectives to the broader environment, some of the articles could have adopted a wider empirical perspective which would have related the detailed and sometimes rather personal inside views to a corresponding world outside the bounded realms of the various religious communities.

A number of articles address the religious communities' interaction with wider society in a highly illuminating manner. Regina Gemignani, for instance, addresses the professional achievements of immigrant women, particularly nurses, who successfully transplant previously acquired skills to the American setting (whereas men seem to be less successful in this regard). In this context religious groups function as social support networks which both enable women's achievements and redirect these to the benefit of the community. As, in addition, churches act as spaces into which numerous matters of private life are transferred, Gemignani challenges conceptions of the private sphere as being one of women's subordination and passivity. Her study breaks with the assumption of religion as distinct, home-oriented and inward-looking (a perspective prevalent in the majority of articles). Hence, she underlines important correlations that link religious